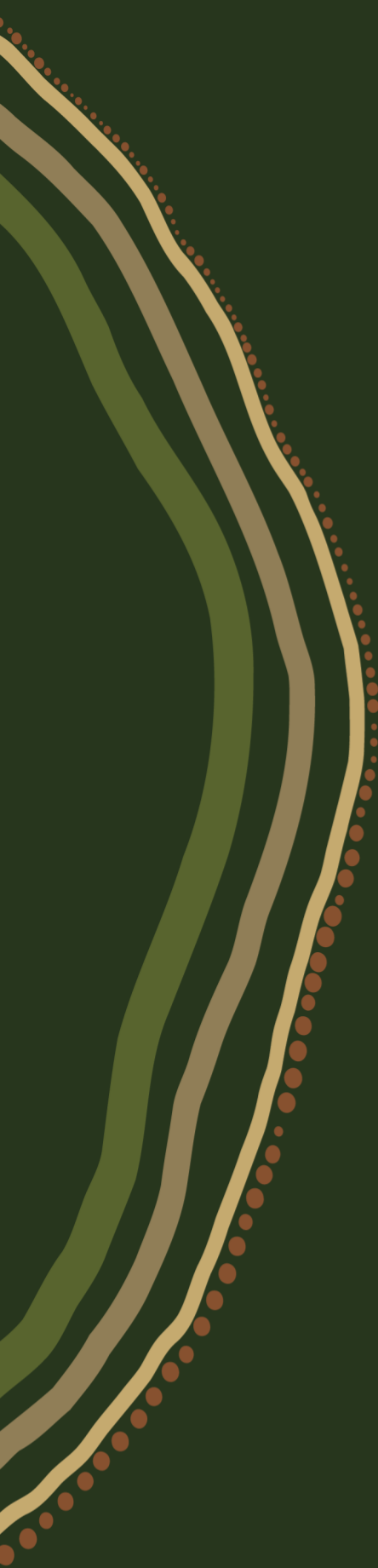




Protecting our Places Grant Evaluation

Final Report of Findings

March 2024

NSW Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water

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Acknowledgment

Murawin acknowledges
Australia's First Peoples as
the Traditional Owners,
Custodians & Cultural
Knowledge Holders
of Country.

We pay our respect to
Elders, past & present. We
honour the deep time
continuing connections to
cultures, kin, &
communities.

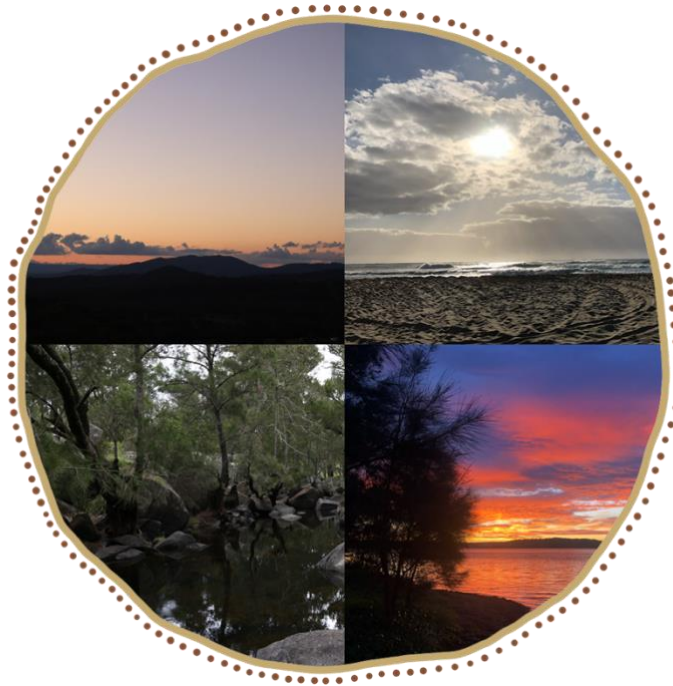
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Introduction

The New South Wales Government, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) has engaged Murawin to evaluate the Protecting our Places (POP) Grants Program. This program was established in 2002 and in this time has funded over 240 First Nations community-led environmental projects in New South Wales.



The evaluation seeks to understand how the POP program empowers and provides opportunities that:

- contribute to ongoing sustainable management of significant First Nations cultural landscapes in New South Wales
- contribute to healthier environments and communities.
- develop project management capabilities of First Nations groups.
- encourage new collaborations and positive relationships with other organisations, government, and stakeholders.

This evaluation will also include assessing how the current program guidelines align with the overarching principles of the Department of Premier & Cabinet Grants Administration Guide. This guide outlines the seven core, high-level principles that should inform all NSW Government grants. They are:

1. Robust planning and design
2. Collaboration and partnership
3. Proportionality
4. Outcomes orientation
5. Achieving value for money
6. Governance and accountability
7. Probity and transparency

Project Methodology

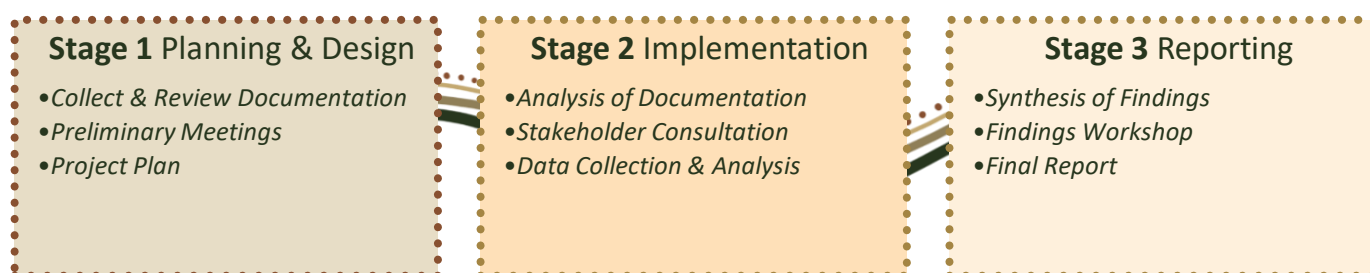
This section provides an overview of our methods, approach, and activities. The report uses a mixed methodology, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected.

Key steps in the methodology included:

1. The quantitative data was triangulated with the findings from interviews to corroborate both positive and negative findings.
2. Comprehensive consultation of stakeholders, with specialised consultation tools for each group. Ensuring a cultural safe approach is embedded into the language and style.
3. Murawin spoke with staff from the Trust to understand the operating context and the way the grant process currently operates and gained an understanding of how the program has evolved.
4. Yarning with grantees was proposed to gather the experiences and outcomes of grantees, ensuring cultural safety, sensitivity, and relevance. We also conducted a short online quantitative survey of both successful and not successful grantees.

This mixed-methods approach ensures a balanced and inclusive understanding of the program's impact and operational effectiveness. We accommodated diverse perspectives and fostered an environment of inclusivity. The integration of specialised consultation tools and culturally sensitive practices such as 'Yarning' underscores the commitment to meaningful and respectful stakeholder engagement.

This evaluation was conducted over the following three stages.



Our Approach to First Nations Engagement

Our approach to First Nations engagement, sits within a framework of self-determination and Indigenous control. This means that specific social and cultural contexts of place are be considered, and engagement occurs at the scale of a group's 'Country'.¹

Our engagement came from a place of respect and cultural understanding; reciprocity was maintained throughout the whole process.

¹ Janet Hunt, "Engaging with Indigenous Australia – exploring the conditions for effective relationships with First Nations and Torres Strait Islander communities", Closing the gap clearinghouse, AIHW (2013), p1

We encouraged all parties to take responsibility for their input into the process; appreciating that all input is purposeful and meaningful.

Murawin was mindful of considering all voices, and we took efforts to ensure that everyone who wished to engage had the opportunity to do so. Murawin has kept stakeholders informed and engaged throughout this project.

Limitations and Barriers

Some of the limitations and barriers with this evaluation are summarised below.

- Consultation with First Nations people in Australia necessitates an understanding of cultural protocols. This includes gaining permission from a Traditional Owner, Elder or respected community person, to build relationships and create rapport.
- The 2023-24 festive season saw many organisations take an extended break from mid-December to late January. Engaging during this period was challenging with office and organisation closures.
- Many PoP recipients are volunteer organisations and their capacity to contribute stretched their resources. This impacted on the number of individual organisation contributions.
- For organisations that are experiencing a high staff turnover, there were barriers to getting a full understanding of the grant processes, as new staff were not involved in the funded grant program.
- There was no budget to compensate the participants' for the time that they contributed to the evaluation. We expect this limited the ability of some participants to fully contribute. In future, consideration should be given to placing contract requirements on grantees to fully cooperate with Departmental funded evaluations, research of quality improvements – see Recommendation 37.

Data collection summary

Invitations were extended to all grantees and applicants of the PoP grant program, to participate in the evaluation from the DPE.

Data was collected through:

Primary data collection

1. 1:1 interviews
2. online survey

Secondary Data

3. Administrative reports
4. Grantee acquittals and reports
5. Data from the Department
6. Desktop review

Qualitative engagement

All engagement for the evaluation was voluntary and confidential, every participant had the right to not participate and could withdraw their information at any time prior to the final report. For this evaluation there was no monetary incentive provided.

A few organisations declined to participate. Mostly this was due to staff changes and the current staff not being aware of the PoP program.

A summary of the recruitment activity to encourage the stakeholders to participate in the evaluation.

Table 1 -Engagement Attempts

Time	Stakeholder	Engagement Activity
November 2023	DPE	Focus group
	DPE	Individual interviews
	Grantees (short list)	Email from DPE
December 2023	Grantees (short list)	Email from Murawin for interview
	Grantees (short list)	Telephone call from Murawin
	Applicants	Email from Murawin for interview
	Grantees	Email with Survey link
January 2024	Grantees	Email to all
	Grantees	Telephone call from Murawin
	Grantees	Email to all
	Grantees	Telephone call from Murawin
	DPE (TRC)	Focus Group
February 2024	Applicants	Telephone call from Murawin
	Grantees	Email & Telephone those that requested more times

Table 2 - Sample interviewed.

Place	Number of Organisations	Number of Attendees
Grantees	11	15
Applicants	3	4
NSW Government - Trust	2	5
Other Stakeholders/Groups	2	5
Online Survey		4
Total	18	31



Other First Nations environmental grant programs

Murawin has performed a desk-based analysis of existing grants that support environmental, cultural and/or land conservation initiatives. We compared grants that had similar objectives and values as the Protecting our Place (PoP) grant program.

Some grants also targeted sites that had significant heritage value, but not necessarily related to First Nations people or their culture. Our desk-based analysis focused on specific First Nations funding, but other grant programs also welcomed applications from First Nations and Torres Strait Islander groups, communities, and landholders.

Some examples of funding sources that were not tied to specific deadlines were the national agencies such as the Indigenous Land and Sea Council (ILSC) and the National Indigenous Australian Agency (NIAA). These agencies tended to fund larger and longer-term projects that aimed to acquire and develop land, improve the health of people and animals, and enhance the infrastructure, equipment, and facilities.

Another type of funding that was relevant for our purposes was the one that supported Native Title bodies with governance and administration. This was important because First Nations organisations need to balance the management of their organisation with the practical work of caring for their Country. This also aligned with the PoP guidelines that encouraged project management training to build skills within the organisation.

The funding amount varied widely across different grants, ranging from a minimum of \$1,000 to a maximum of \$250,000. The average funding amount is \$120,000 due to larger grant programs and the median amount is \$75,000. The Western Australian government had a limit of \$40,000 for its grants, but most of them were around \$20,000. We found that the five-year budget plans were readily accessible, but the annual budget plans were more difficult to obtain in this scan.

We reviewed various disaster grants that aimed to assist communities affected by natural disasters or weather events such as bushfire, flooding, or cyclone. We found that these grants were mostly reactive and short-term, focusing on a specific community or location of the disaster impact. They did not address the long-term environmental challenges, cultural preservation, or land stewardship. Moreover, disaster grants were not tailored to the needs and aspirations of First Nations peoples and their communities.

The Queensland Government's [Looking after Country](#) grant program is the most comparable with PoP's objectives and requirements. The program provides funding of up to \$75 000 for projects that support the conservation and management of natural and cultural resources on Indigenous lands and seas. The program has a competitive two-stage application process, where only selected applicants from the first stage are invited to submit a full proposal in the second stage. The program was launched in 2018 and was previously known as the Queensland Indigenous Land and Sea Grant.

Table 3 -First Nation specific environmental grants

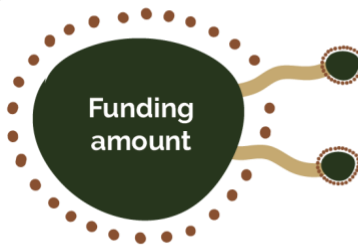
Funder	Grant Name	Funding Available
Queensland Government	Looking after Country Grant Program	\$75 000 per grant
Northern Territory Government	First Nations Rangers Grant	Up to \$200 000 – 1 year Up to \$300 000 – 2 years
National Indigenous Agency Australia (NIAA)	Capacity Building for Native Title Corporations	\$50 000 - \$750 000
Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC)	Our Country, Our Future	Open ended. (available on request)



Summary of Key Findings

Through consultation with grantees, applicants, NSW Government staff, other stakeholders, four overarching themes emerged.

1.



The current grant amount of \$80,000 is not sufficient to conduct meaningful work.

PoP Grant over all investment has not increased in 22 years. It is deemed that a further increase is required for grantees to achieve better outcomes.

2.



Refine and simplify the application process.

Improve reporting systems to be adaptable for organisations that are poorly resourced.

3.



Clearer messaging during application

Better communication for unsuccessful applicants

More consistent contact with grantees during implementation stage

4.



More engagement required with the broader First Nations community to improve the awareness of the grants.

The Trust should effectively promote existing environmental projects and share technical knowledge through organised events.

Domains

Responses to the key evaluation questions are detailed in the following sections ordered by domains. The sub questions have been numbered and are aligned to each section of this evaluation report. It should be noted that, one section may cover sub questions from other domains to ensure the report reads effectively and to avoid duplication. For the full list of sub questions please see Appendix B – Key Evaluation Questions

Table 4 - Domains & Evaluation Questions

Domain	1. Appropriateness	2. Effectiveness	3. Efficiency	4. Equity	5. Legacy
Evaluation Questions	How appropriately positioned and resourced is the Program?	How effective is the program delivery and design?	How efficiently is the program being delivered?	How equitable is the program?	How enduring are the program outcomes?
Sub Questions	1.1 to 1.6 6 sub questions	2.1 to 2.9 9 sub questions	3.1 to 3.7 7 sub questions	4.1 to 4.7 7 sub questions	5.1 to 5.4 4 sub questions

1. Appropriateness

This section describes how appropriately the PoP program is positioned and resourced. It refers to sub questions, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6 from Appendix B – Key Evaluation Questions.

Grant Guidelines, priorities and policy (Sub questions 1.1, 1.2)

Throughout the evaluation the Principles of the Grant Administration were evaluated and reviewed. The principles are abided by however there could be more flexibility and adjustment to the PoP program to ensure it is a benefit to First Nations communities and their environment.

Principles	Overview
Robust planning and design	The Capacity Building Workshop assists Grantees with the planning and design. The Trust can improve its engagement and communication with Grantees to assist with risk identification and management. Refer to Recommendation 19, 21, 24, 30
Collaboration and partnership	Better collaboration is needed with Grantees and stakeholders. It was commonly stated that improved communication and relationship building would address challenges and assist in promoting successes. This works towards reducing administration costs for the Trust trying to engage with Grantees at a late stage when the project may be limping. Refer to Recommendation 3, 17, 18
Proportionality	PoP grants do not vary in scale however there is opportunity for officials to reduce the burden of reporting requirements with an improved

	streamlined reporting system. Refer to Recommendation 26 and 27
An outcome orientation	PoP grants are designed and implemented to achieve outcomes in line with the NSW objectives. These are linked to the NSW Strategic Goals 22, 23 and 26
Achieving value with relevant money	Many PoP grants demonstrate cost-effectiveness for the Trust. However, this comes at the expense of grantees who contribute both in-kind and financial support. It's important to note that the long-term benefits of these projects are not uniformly reflected across all initiatives. Specifically, environmental work often occurs during the maintenance phase rather than remediation. Refer to Recommendation 11
Governance and accountability	The existing policies, guidelines, and procedures are currently operational. However, they may not align well with the needs and context of grantees' organisations. Refer to Recommendation 22, 26, 29
Probity and transparency	Improvements in the areas of promotion of government grants to ensure that the whole state is informed and provided with equal funding opportunities. Refer to Recommendation 15 and 32

Meeting Market Demand (Sub question 1.3)

The Protecting our Places (PoP) grant program has been influential in preserving culturally significant sites, including ceremony places, traditional graves, carved trees. As an example, grantees have implemented activities that:

- prevent future misuse of sacred sites,
- reduce cultural places being used for illegal dumping,
- stop public nuisances through fence building,
- improved signage to share the cultural history and the significance of these places.

Projects also included efforts into restoration, rejuvenation and attempting to restore ecosystems.

Education plays a key role in bringing community people, in particular young people back to Country to learn about the history. This self-development includes activities such as fire training and fire-burning practices and the sharing of traditional knowledge and customs. The restoration of cultural practices across New South Wales has been a testament to the program's commitment to revitalising traditional knowledge and customs.

Collaboration with communities can lead to wider and more inclusive community engagement with the environment. Grantees regularly stated that cultural and heritage protection, and caring for Country through bush regeneration, rediscovery of language and artefacts has provided a connection to ancestral roots.

The Trust Systems, materials, and procedures (Sub question 1.4.)

The experience with the Trust team was reported as largely positive. They were described as supportive and approachable with many Grantees stating that they felt very comfortable with their interactions. While the Trust was deemed to be flexible, government bureaucracy was noted to be a regular hiccup in processes and decision making. This was a hinderance to providing a best practice service to the Grantees.

I just think that there needed to be a little bit more, umm, softly, softly approach to us rather than a regulatory approach" (Grantee)

"They assisted us to be able to report back on the types of weeds and the treatments that we've undertaken and all those sorts of things. (Grantee)

"The trust could be a bit more aggressive in terms of employing more First Nations people because the discussions, had largely with the trust were around cultural significance and cultural importance and the linkage of environment and culture and water and all that sort of stuff." (Grantee)

Historically government agencies have been disconnected from First Nations communities and genuine relationships have not been created and maintained.

Challenges were noted, particularly with the changing of Trust staff, which affected the grant reporting process. The changeover of staff from the application stage to implementation and reporting stages, sometimes resulted in a communication breakdown with adverse effects. Potentially more regular and informal contact such as through a progress meeting would alleviate some of the disconnect. It could keep grantees engaged and the Trust would be more aware of potential barriers grantees are facing.

The Trust staff were reliable at providing technical advice on how to navigate ecological challenges.

"If we had project meetings],[and they asked] are you progressing with this, this, this, and this; that would keep people on track and stop people falling behind, including myself" (Grantee)

"...a phone call to go through your [project], whether it's once every six months, [or] possibly once every, three or four months, to say how are you going with your project [would be nice]. (Grantee)

Internal resourcing to service customers and the Technical Review Committee (Sub questions 1.5, 1.6, 3.6)

The Technical Review Committee's (TRC) role is to provide advice and recommendations to the Trust on the practicability and worthiness of grant applications. However, during the consultations, the TRC defines its role as serving the community rather than the New South Wales government. The TRC acknowledges that the PoP grant program does contribute to a need within First Nations communities. However, they highlight barriers that hinder its ability to effect meaningful change. As an example, the TRC has expressed concern over the low number of First Nations communities applying for the PoP grant, indicating a level of frustration regarding this issue.

"...and there was another one down [not approved for funding], they got denied because their application wasn't properly done and that sort of stuff. (TRC)

"if the Trust could do like a little short 2-minute film or something to say what can be funded and one can't be funded because that's who we're going to [fund]. (TRC)

First Nations people are very visual and oral people, so to get that down on paper and for them to read it in black and white, I think there's a communication gap between - what can be funded and what can't be funded, what needs to be addressed, what can't be addressed. (TRC)

There were several areas, the TRC felt the grant process needed addressing to ensure the sustainability of PoP moving into the future. These have been summarised here:

Broader Guidelines. The TRC would like broader guidelines on funding applications and see the scope widened to include remediation of Country. It was noted that removing rubbish and weeds does not leave enough money to remediate Country. The TRC would like a structure to bring back cultural heritage through land, flora, fauna, and the waterways. The Trust needs to be more versatile with the scope of project applications.

Provide First Nations organisations with clear messaging and support. The Technical Review Committee (TRC) urges the Trust to adopt a more proactive approach in communicating with applicants. This includes providing clear feedback on why their applications were unsuccessful and offering guidance on how they can be improved. Previous grantees reapplying indicates a level of comfort with receiving funding. The TRC would like to see innovative ways to attract new grantees.

To talk through what you may need to do to be successful next time, but it could come back to a cultural thing where they may feel shame”
(Grantee)

Increased applications from a variety of organisations. The TRC as community representatives, there was irritation regarding the government's lack of effort in offering First Nations organisations advice and a user-friendly approach for applications. The current practice is deemed culturally inappropriate. As an example of a better approach, the TRC suggests that the Trust could make additional phone calls to discuss applications informally, reach out in a genuine manner, and provide applicants with examples of successful past projects.

Opportunity to share technical knowledge. The TRC recognises the importance of sharing technical knowledge at a ground level to enhance the capacity of organisations to deliver solid projects. The TRC would like the Trust to provide information sessions or forums at a regional level and give First Nations organisations and communities the information and knowledge they need to grow and become stronger. Each TRC committee member has unique attributes and skills to share.

Additional time. The TRC requires additional time to look through and evaluate the applications before they provide feedback. To maximise their knowledge and expertise additional time is required to provide their consideration and judgement on the applications.

Direct Contact. Develop a method for grantees to engage with the TRC directly, develop a method to allow community to speak directly with them potentially in regional forums.

“I have had feedback that they [Grantee] don't understand it, like they don't understand what can be funded, even though it's explained perfectly. They need an example of what can be approved or not. New applicants are not making it through, the ones that do get approved, are [the] previous grantee recipients” (TRC)

Recommendations

1. The Trust allocates resources to promote the grants to First Nations people. This could be through social media, a variety of new communications channels or community events that specifically attract First Nations people.
2. The Trust implements a continuous improvement process for grantees to follow. This could include facilitating a Community of Practice or Community Forums.
3. The Trust implements regular online meetings with Grantees to manage the progress of activities, potentially at six-month intervals.
4. The Trust provides more authentic cultural resources by increasing the number of First Nations staff employed and they are supported to have more on-the-ground engagement.
5. The Trust should utilise the TRC's technical knowledge for the benefit of all grantees. There is potential to share the knowledge through a Community of Practice.
6. Provide the TRC with additional time to review applications. The amount of time should be worked out in collaboration between the Trust and the TRC.
7. The Trust should provide applicants with culturally competent communication regarding their application not being approved. Ensure there is acknowledgment and respect in the messaging.

2. Effectiveness

This section refers to sub questions 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.7, 2.9 for 2.6 refer to [Benefits for community](#) and for 2.8 refer to [Application Process](#) from Appendix B - Key Evaluation Questions.

Ecosystems and Environment (Sub questions 2.1, 2.4, 2.7, 4.1,)

First Nations people have a deep connection with land, waters, plants, animals, heritage, lore, religions and more. Caring for Country is fundamental to spiritual identity, culture, economy, socialisation and holistic health. It can be explained by number of different activities such as:

- Burning (cleansing for ceremony and for hunting)
- Using the resources for hunting and fishing
- Protecting the integrity of Country and its species through respect
- Protecting sacred areas
- Educating a new generation and teaching on Country
- Performing ceremonies.

Caring for Country involves maintaining the land's health, grounded in the understanding that "if you look after the Country, the Country will look after you." This practice is essential for the well-being of both the land and its people. First Nations people have been Caring for Country for thousands of years, yet in recent years, it has changed into more formal arrangements between communities and governments.

Caring for Country has several distinct benefits. This includes health, wellbeing, cultural, economic, and environmental. Being “on Country” and “caring for Country” provides ecological benefit and positive health impacts through diets, more exercise and enhanced family wellbeing and spiritual connection.

The direct benefit described by First Nations people has a positive effect with community engagement, employment prospects and valuing the history of the land. Eradication of weeds, protection of culture and heritage, improved natural areas in biodiversity and aesthetics.

Conversely, the benefits to ecosystems and the environment are limited, primarily due to the size of the grants. Many grantees describe their projects as maintaining the Country but to sustain and enhance their work, there is a clear need for increased funding.

Participants note that climate change is increasing damage and maintenance costs to infrastructure and biodiversity. It was strongly stated that climate change is creating greater risks to the environment, however the PoP grant program does not address these issues.

The impact of bushfires, floods, rising sea levels, temperatures, residential urban sprawl, and tourism continues to affect Country. This cycle of impact creates a revolving and exhaustive effort to protect, conserve, repair, heal, and restore both land and water territories.

The PoP grant program is insufficient to address any long-term or systemic issues. Projects could be aimed at protecting culture and heritage from climate change impacts such as erosion, fire, and floods. While there is potential for cultural burning projects to generate economic benefits, the PoP grant fails to consider escalating costs, such as insurance.

The PoP grant program was sometimes referred to as a “one-person employment program” with not enough money to do meaningful work over a long period of time. Once the project management costs are deducted, the grant does not leave enough to improve the ecosystems for the future. Addressing the environment and ecosystems would take more than two years of funding.

Grantees that are located in outer regional areas experience additional challenges regarding increased costs, a reduced number of suppliers and vendors to choose from and attracting staff to fill vacancies. This further impacts the outputs of the project.

“The one thing that I hate is ‘certain species’. Uh A lot of weight is given to what certain species there are, and so you tend to be looking for blocks of land that have got these species doesn't mean to say that they're not important than those the other blocks of land, but certain species get gives you that tick., So you're tending to walk past the blocks that don't have that. You don't know if have certain species on, so you're always looking for blocks that have koalas”
(Grantee)

Partnerships (sub questions 2.2, 2.5)

Partnerships are crucial to the success of PoP projects, and they are created for several intentions and benefits. Some of the partners include Traditional Owners, ecologists, councils, men's groups, Registered Trainer Organisations and other community organisations. Grantees stated that these partnerships are developed at a ground level within the community the projects are working. Few partnerships were stated to be developing environmental expertise for the Grantees, they were predominately for in-kind support and community education and benefit.

"Connecting with the Rotary Club was fantastic because they've been chomping at the bit to better engage with First Nations community." Bringing them together with First Nations communities is really beneficial." (Grantee)

Partnerships have the ability to increase resources, share knowledge and provide appreciation, acknowledgement and promotion for the work grantees are working to achieve.

Most commonly in-kind contributions were provided through donations, volunteers, and joint land management. Joint land management partnerships had some barriers, concerning heritage, however these issues were worked through.

Program Logic (sub question 2.3)

The overarching goal of the PoP program is to actively contribute to the ongoing sustainable management of significant Aboriginal cultural landscapes in New South Wales.

The program aims to safeguard and disseminate culturally significant knowledge. While progress has been made, there remains a gap in engagement with other public stakeholders (those not directly involved as partners) and the State government. Addressing this gap is crucial for holistic impact. The below table provides an overview.

	Links	Shortcomings	No Evidence
Partnerships	Partnerships are being developed.		
Capacity Building	Cultural practices are being documented	Aboriginal organisations are not being enhanced or supported adequately.	
	Knowledge is being shared to protect and restore cultural sites.	Developing skills and engaging	
		Grantees are unable to sustain/fund continued management projects	

Awareness Training	Awareness withing communities of cultural sites & significance		Traditional practices are understood and broadly understood
Increased Participation		A broad cross section of Aboriginal organisations in PoP	Private & Public land managers are engaged in on ground activities
Land Management	Aboriginal land, cultural resources, sites are being restored		Activities that incentivise appropriate and sustainable use of natural resources.
Application of Cultural Knowledge	Aboriginal land is managed in a way that enhances and protects environmental and cultural values		Applying cultural practices to ensure natural resource management to address present and future issues
Policy	Contributes to Governments priorities for Aboriginal communities		
	Consistent with policy and legislation		
Cultural Respect	Acknowledges and respects Aboriginal culture and traditions	Aboriginal communities are consulted with on all aspects	
Governance			Delivery is consistent with Trust legal standards
			Project delivered in accordance with application and objectives are met
			Projects are acquitted and grant funds expended appropriately

Capacity Building workshops (Sub questions 2.9)

The Capacity Building workshops have been well-received, especially for their support with the Project Implementation Plan (PIP). The purpose of the workshops is to provide project management knowledge and understand reporting requirements, however, it's uncertain whether the training enhances the quality of grant outcomes, project management skills and reporting needs.

The attendance ranged from three to four participants per organisation indicating a positive engagement level. The workshops are delivered regionally and used as relationship building with the Trust staff and other grantees.

They grantees don't need to go and do too much additional work, and that's a bit of a challenge because it's not uncommon for us to have people attend the workshop, who know nothing about the project. (Stakeholder)

The Project Implementation Plan has helped grantees to identify potential risks, outline stakeholders and partners, understand the necessary language, and manage their budgets. These aspects are particularly beneficial for participants who lack an administrative background.

Some elements of the training were found to be redundant by some First Nations participants. Potentially the relevance of certain workshop components may need re-visiting to ensure relevance for the targeted participants.

They [workshops] weren't bad ... we just want to do the activities. Voluntary organisations don't have the time to do them. (Grantee)

For participants who weren't involved in the conception of the project or the application process they reported the workshops as highly beneficial. To enhance knowledge transfer, it was suggested to include or offer more team members in the training sessions.

There is confusion regarding the payment of partners, Elders, and other people to attend training. The Trust needs clearer, relevant messaging about who should participate at the workshops and who will benefit.

Attendees found it valuable to learn how the grant system operated, especially the strategy of staging the grant across several funding rounds. However, they noted that this information was of limited use at the time of the workshop since it related to future funding rounds, and they could have better utilised this information at the beginning of the process.

"RE: PoP, I found out there was more flexibility than was apparent - knowing in the future that we can present our own style that would be our preferred option." (Grantee)

Attendees are advised to strategically plan for the next funding round and stage their work accordingly. However, there's a shortfall in recognising the time, resources, and burden that funding applications impose on small organisations, with no guarantee of success. Consultation with a Trust staff member would strongly assist with the reapplication and reduce the unnecessary time and resources from Grantees.

“We struggled getting Indigenous partners to the workshops, as they need to be paid. The Trust agreed to have them paid, but this should be clearer in the application. Council staff go, and they get paid.” (Administrator)

Qualified project managers found the workshops unhelpful and questioned the decision to make attendance compulsory for all grantees, including those in their third or fourth application. They doubted whether this was a prudent use of public funds.

It was suggested that the workshops focus on integrating the current administrative and cultural practices of the grantees' organisations into the Trust's criteria. This approach is preferred over the organisations trying to adopt new templates and processes.

Recommendations

8. NSW Government to consider the scale of their approach to addressing climate change through these grants and alter the grant offering accordingly.
9. The Trust to provide Grantees with clear guidelines and sets expectations prior to the Capacity Building workshops.
10. The Trust should continue to offer capacity-building workshops to Grantees, specifically targeting new staff who require upskilling. Additionally, the Trust should broadly communicate any additional training opportunities to all Grantees.
11. The Trust to evaluate the benefit of repeat attendance of administration partners who provide secretariat services and who have already completed the training.



3. Efficiency

This section refers to sub questions 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 For 3.6 refer to [Internal resourcing to service customers](#) and 3.7 refer to [Attracting a broader range of applicants](#) from Appendix B - Key Evaluation Questions.

Grant funding to meet the environment need (Sub question 3.1,3.2)

The grant currently offers \$80 000 with two stages. The planning stage has a budget of \$12,000 and the implementation stage has an \$68 000 allocation, noting there is an allocation of \$1 000 for the audit.

Most grantees stated that \$80 000 does not effectively fund the works required. This is for several reasons including insurance, staff costs, and inflation. These are risks that an organisation is aware of but is unable to incorporate into the project at the time of application. Organisations are scaling their work to the level of funding available, however the environmental outcomes would improve if time wasn't spent sourcing in-kind support and donations. Covid 19 was regularly reported as having a financial impact on organisations with some costs increasing by 40% since 2020 and projects are still being completed from the period when the pandemic was evolving.

"Funding should be increased to enable the Indigenous organisations to employ a 'Project Lead' directly for managing the project, this does not suit all organisations but does suit some. (Grantee)"

Organisations with larger infrastructure for example, local councils or non-Indigenous organisations absorb some costs by self-funding vehicles and administrative staff. These larger organisations don't rely upon grants in their operations and appear to find the amount sufficient. It has been reported that their success has led to repeated approvals of their applications.

"[It's like] you must be applying for \$7 million, because it's the same process, whereas I think the process for us, even though there's lots of good learning in it, we wouldn't do it again. (Grantee)"

Grantees stated that administration costs were not covered in the funding. It was noted that even if the percentage is increased to 15% the overall funding is too small for this to make a difference. Most were dependent on pro-bono donations from personal connections. It was estimated that while the project management has the administration in a line cost of 8 hours a week, that 10-20 hours per week is more accurate. The administrative costs are generally an in-kind contribution from the Grantee's organisations.

Improved grant process streams (sub question 3.5)

Many grantees were aware they could stage their project over two or more funding rounds to achieve the scope of work needed. However, there was frustration with this approach because it demands the resources of submitting two applications and attending capacity-building workshops. Given the competitive nature of the application process, there's no guarantee that their application will be approved.

Grantees expressed a need for a higher funding allocation to support on-ground works, community engagement and employment initiatives. The current grant size is restrictive and required rolling grants requires a more strategic approach with no guarantee. There is a need for ongoing funding commitments beyond the initial grant.

Grantees highlighted an important consideration is the alignment between encouragement for larger staged projects and the application process. To address this, it is recommended that the application process be streamlined for the second and third stages of the project. This will ensure a more efficient and concise process, allowing grantees to focus on the substantive aspects of their applications/proposals.

The funding might be considered sufficient if the project could be delivered within a shorter timeframe. However, accurately accounting for variables such as weather conditions, staffing, and unforeseen events is challenging.

While the PoP grants mostly achieve their objectives, there is room for a stronger emphasis on practical, on-site activities. Currently, a significant portion of the funding is consumed by administrative tasks, such as project management and stakeholder engagement. A more effective approach could involve the NSW Government offering incentives to Councils to lead community engagement efforts, thereby capitalising on their extensive reach through both traditional and social media.

While community engagement is essential, its importance could be more effectively balanced with the State Government's ability to directly interact with communities. Additionally, the PoP grant program could be acknowledged for its role in actively involving First Nations young people. If the State Government were to offer incentives to grantees for enhancing community engagement, the potential reach through traditional and social media channels could be significantly amplified.

"Definitely not. No, there you know it's essentially an employment program at \$80,000. It's just, it's just not enough for to really do meaningful work over a long period of time, you know?" (Grantee)

From our desktop review, the average amount provided for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander environmental grants is around \$120,000. The Trust needs to increase the dollar amount to ensure they are addressing the environmental outcomes they aim to achieve.

There's an opportunity to scale this funding by offering new organisations a reduced amount, such as \$80,000. However, this would still not cover the costs of administration, application, and implementation. It's recommended that if the Trust adopts a tiered system, they should reduce the requirements for the \$80,000 grant to make it a feasible option for new applicants.

Providing incentives for the successful completion of a project could also encourage its completion, but the monetary value of these incentives should not be linked to additional administrative reporting or compliance requirements.

Trust resources and support (Sub questions 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4,3.5)

The current systems of reporting and relationship building are not culturally appropriate. It was regularly stated that informal meetings and progress updates would be preferred to enhance a project's chance of continued success.

Grantees have noted a shortage of First Nations staff and the need for assertiveness. For the Trust to offer genuine support to many grantees and communities, relying on a single staff member is seen as a tokenistic approach. A substantial investment in resources is essential.

It was identified that having more First Nations staff would significantly enhance the resources and support available to grantees and stakeholders for successful project delivery. Grantees expressed their desire for clearer points of contact, and there is optimism that the PoP Grant Team will expand its staffing beyond a single person. This would improve the ability for Grantees and stakeholders to efficiently deliver projects.

"Umm, so you get this situation, one person on the ground who's working with you. And making sure that your projects on track ongoing physically and then the person in head office who's saying, well, where's your report?"
(Grantee)

Grantees and stakeholders could not compare PoP's cost effectiveness to national or international programs. We refer to [Appendix B](#) for other environmental grant programs and [Other Aboriginal environmental grant programs](#) within this report.

Variations

Variations to the grants were generally required for adverse weather events, partners falling out or other unforeseeable events, with COVID19 regularly being mentioned. The variation process was referred to as simple and easy with a written request to the Trust via email. Almost all grantees spoken to had applied for a variation or were in the process of requesting one, those that hadn't were either new to the project/organisation or the project was in the early stages.

Although many are familiar with the variation process, it is not the preferred approach, as extending the timeline effectively reduces the monetary value of the project.

It was mentioned that not knowing how to access the correct person within the Trust was time-consuming, making the process longer than necessary. To address this issue, it was suggested that regular check-ins on the project and organisation should be implemented. This approach would ensure that both grantees and the Trust stay on track with the project and avoid unnecessary delays.

Grantees consistently emphasised the need for increased funding. While shortening the timeframes does not reduce the funding requirement, it's important to note that the current funding remains insufficient to fully complete the necessary projects.

“\$80,000? [the funding] should be more. 2 years is reasonable, they could be flexible on the timeframes [and we know] we can vary.” (Grantee)

Recommendations

12. Increase the grant total to \$120,000 to be comparable to many other First Nation environmental grant programs.
13. Implement a tiered system including reducing the administration requirements for lower value grants making it a more viable opportunity for new applicants.
14. If projects are to be staged over multiple funding rounds, this requires a streamlined application process that is concise, efficient, and succinct.
15. The Trust should utilise regular meetings to identify the need for project variations earlier in the timeline.

4. Equity

This section refers to sub questions 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6 for 4.1 refer to [Ecosystems and Environment](#) from Appendix B - Key Evaluation Questions.

Attracting a broader range of applicants (Sub question 3.7, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7)

Securing funding for the PoP grants was recognised as challenging. Additionally, it was noted that there was not widespread promotion directed to First Nations peoples and organisations through appropriate media channels. Utilising social media and less traditional methods of advertising could reach the First Nations people and communities in a more accessible way.

The consultation with existing Grantees noted their primary method for learning about upcoming grants and funding rounds was through existing networks, most identifying they received this information via email. Outside of this communication channel, it seemed that grantees were not aware of any public announcements or the broader dissemination of information, despite the publication of notices in newspapers. This situation posed a significant disadvantage for organisations that lacked existing connections to the PoP grant program.

Grantees stated that the lack of awareness about the funding points to a broader issue of visibility and outreach. It was suggested that the Trust and NSW Government improve and update their communication and engagement regarding the PoP grants to ensure an equitable access to funding and resources.

We've been doing work out on site, on Country for about three years and it was just all pro bono and I think someone who came along to one of the community days out there said, "Ohh, you can get funding through the Trust. So we had a look and applied for funding a few years back and they knocked us back. (Grantee)

The wider First Nations community is generally unaware of PoP grant funding. Direct, face to face engagement at a community level from the NSW Government is key to broadening the range of applicants. Site visits could explore community needs and gain a better understanding of how the PoP grant could be utilised.

The site visits could provide the Trust with valuable assets, including a collection of success stories for marketing purposes and opportunities for staff professional development. It will also allow for the establishment of new relationships with potential applicants and insights into the unique needs of each community. This approach could lead to fewer project failures and offer opportunities to leverage other Trust resources, such as the Technical Review Committee.



Well, we're trying to teach young ones about First Nations way of looking out to Country and it's also we got the workers coming along and teaching the kids the scientific way of doing stuff on Country. (Grantee)

But yeah, I'd like you to know, that's the reason why I love taking kids out on Country. Teach them.... Take their phones off them. Bloody walking through the Bush. Talk to [them] about this and that. (Grantee)

Application Process (Sub question 2.8. 4.3, 4.4)

The application process was generally described as onerous and complex for the funding on offer. This highlights the complexities of navigating the grant application, especially when operating several projects and dealing with funding bodies.

The application process should be made simpler. There should be easier processes for First Nations organisations to justify their capacity to deliver the project and manage the grant monies. For example, if organisations were permitted to submit their current practices and systems, in lieu of rewriting their processes into the application, this would be far more time efficient and allow more clarity for the reader.

Grantees voiced frustration over the imprecise feedback provided for unsuccessful applications and several described their unsuccessful attempts. While some were successful in subsequent applications, a more transparent explanation of how their initial applications was lacking would have been appreciated. The need to reapply repeatedly evoked feelings of "begging again," adding a sense of stigma to the process.

"There could be a better screening process...rather than going through a whole application process." (Grantee)

This sentiment was underscored by both applicants and grantees who suggested that the State Government does not fully comprehend the opportunity cost for time lost on unsuccessful applications. Grantees who have been repeatedly successful empathise with these smaller organisations, understanding the strain on staff and resources. Furthermore, it was noted that the uncertainty of funding contributes to difficulties in sustaining a workforce and further developing their capabilities within the organisation.

This issue could be addressed by introducing a pre-screening process or a staged approach that efficiently channels interest and guides the project more effectively. Importantly, this staged approach should be tailored to the needs of First Nations organisations without adding an additional layer of administrative burden.

"[We don't find the application hard], but it would depend on if they were professional Indigenous organisations or community groups, they could potentially struggle with the application process." (Administration partner)

Applicants would greatly benefit from a simplified application process with fewer questions. Refining the application could help organisations submit more competitive applications. While the current design of the application streamlines the assessment process for the Trust, it makes it more challenging for applicants to respond.

*"We actually applied for funding a few years back and they knocked it back."
"They weren't sure that it was a First Nations organisation...so they basically said they misunderstood what type of organization it is." (Grantee)*

Alignment with First Nations Culture and Values (Sub question 4.1, 4.5, 4.6)

Most of the interviewees suggested that the PoP grant program could be better tailored for First Nations, people, organisations, and communities.

Many grantees were unaware of the resources needed to comply with the grant conditions when they began. Staffing challenges further affect their ability to report on progress. Despite these issues, grantees have successfully represented and promoted the work undertaken through this grant program.

"We're all First Nations people. So, what we wanted was in there, was in the project plan. So yeah, if the process was streamlined it would be better. It was a big application. I will say that" (Grantee)

Despite the funding amount, it was mentioned that managing more money requires just as much effort due to the extensive recording and reporting requirements of the grant. It was observed that a full-time role is necessary to document outputs and manage the reporting process.

*"A long process of explaining and justifying and talking with public servants."
(Grantee)*

This highlights the need for a more streamlined and efficient reporting process, especially for the lower end of the grant scale. Reviewing the grant management process can improve the compliance and make it less burdensome for recipients. A user-friendly online reporting portal could reduce the workload and having an acknowledgement of the report and indicating areas that need improvement or increased efficiency.

In regional and remote areas, where internet coverage is limited, an online portal may not be suitable. Community organisations in these areas will continue to use the existing reporting system. As part of this process, Grantees will receive a receipt or acknowledgment upon submission, followed by acceptance and feedback of their report.

Enhancing communication systems and improving relationships could facilitate more open discussions about challenges, ensuring that grantees' understanding of the requirements aligns with the Trust's expectations.

"Admin costs are difficult for us to calculate because a lot of it gets a lot of it is pro bono. So, it's difficult to calculate, but for sure the admin costs are not covered" (Grantee)

The reporting obligations are dependent on the level of experience of the project manager and were referred to as challenging for non-professionals. Staff issues remain a major challenge for organisations to successfully complete reports.

There's also a sense of frustration regarding the final destination of the reports and a lack of acknowledgement and feedback from the Trust. To address this, implementing an online portal that securely stores information for staff reference at a later date would be beneficial. Additionally, providing feedback through culturally appropriate conversations ('yarns') during regular catchups would enhance communication.

Organisations could experience a lighter workload if the Trust were to accommodate the organisations' internal reporting systems, rather than requiring staff to conform to the Trust's spreadsheets.

Introducing an online portal could simplify the reporting process further. Additionally, establishing information-sharing forums, such as a Community of Practice for First Nations organisations, would facilitate networking and knowledge exchange.

Moreover, the timelines for project completion are often unprofitable and futile, considering the level of work required and the pace of environmental change, making it challenging to meet demands with the provided funding.

Then we have a real, really strong linkage about ownership of the actual projects and the programs but if somebody in the line moves on, then somebody needs to replace them. We have a whole lot of historical information and internal knowledge that we can bring that person up to speed very quickly depending on their skills, obviously, and how we're employing them. (Grantee)

Recommendations

16. The Trust invests in face-to-face engagement with Grantees and the communities they work in. This relationship building can assist in building a portfolio of promotional tools such as photos, testimonials, or case studies.
17. The Trust allocates an annual budget to conduct two site visits per annum to Grantees.
18. The PoP Grant staff utilise these site visits to explore community needs and gain an understanding of how the PoP grant could be better utilised.
19. Trust staff to engage with other NSW Government departments in regional areas to introduce PoP.
20. The Trust allocate resources to utilise social media, community events that specifically attract First Nations people.
21. The Trust to improve and strengthen their avenues of advertising to ensure they are current, accessible, and relevant to First Nations communities and applicants.
22. The Trust is to review their mailing list and update to reflect new organisations, grantees, and applicants. This should be reviewed biannually.
23. The Trust to implement a pre-screening process with applicants to ensure their suitability as an applicant for the grant.
24. The Trust to ensure that the pre-screening process is flexible, culturally safe and conducted by First Nations staff.
25. The Trust must simplify the grant application by reducing questions,
26. Modify the application process to allow applicants to append their current policies and systems in place.
27. The Trust should provide visuals (online or recorded video) to assist with the application process, clearly explaining the eligibility and the process.
28. The Trust to introduce an online reporting system that is a more succinct process in lieu of excel spreadsheet.
29. The Trust to utilise the regular meetings to ensure new staff are informed of the reporting practice and expectation.
30. Reduce the reporting criteria and simplify grants on the lower scale (\$80 000).
31. The Trust is to be flexible with its report submissions, for example include videos, photographs and site visits and visual aids.
32. The Trust to provide acknowledgement and feedback on receipt of the report.

5. Legacy

This section refers to sub questions 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4 from Appendix B - Key Evaluation Questions

In reference to sub question 5.4, there is limited information on how project activities are shared with other Aboriginal communities. While many grantees successfully disseminate their projects within their immediate communities, challenges related to capacity and resources persist. For further insights, refer to [Section 4: Equity](#) and explore strategies to attract a broader range of applicants, to enhance the promotion of PoP projects and grant opportunities.

Benefits for community (Sub question 2.6, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3)

Projects focused on protecting cultural heritage reportedly yielded positive outcomes that extended beyond the project's lifespan. These successes were highlighted in terms of creating culturally safe spaces, using Indigenous languages, and perpetuating traditional land practices, thereby strengthening connections to the past. Examples include the restoration of land degraded by farming, which demonstrates the long-term benefits of such initiatives. Socially, these projects contribute to a heightened sense of purpose and identity, allowing individuals to start with one perspective and leave with another, enriched understanding.

It's fantastic, it's going to help my mob so much. A lot of this [type of] thing was done back in the 50s [but] the government stopped [it]. Our Elders, [used to] teach [this] stuff, that's the reason why I don't even know my own language. That was one of the things [they] took away from us.

The main thing, with these kids now - I'd like to teach them the old way that I was taught. Why? They will be Elders for their kids too."
(Grantee)

The Trust has not sufficiently incorporated responses to climate change, nor has it directly targeted this pressing environmental issue. The impacts of bushfires, floods, rising sea levels, and temperatures, as well as the expansion of urban areas and tourism, continue to affect the Country. This ongoing cycle of impact creates a relentless and exhausting need to protect, conserve, repair, heal, and restore both land and water environments.

Currently, the Trust is not tackling these challenges through the Protecting our Places grant funding. The Trust should acknowledge the escalating damages and costs required to sustain the environment and its biodiversity values.

It is recognised that the PoP program cannot respond to all environmental issues, however it can provide its resources and connections to directly inform First Nations communities, councils, and people about how to access funding and information. The additional benefit of working directly with First Nations communities is a lost opportunity for the Trust to keep climate change at the top of the agenda for these urban, rural, and regional areas.

"It's probably a good thing if they had that added component in. When you're putting in for the project, so it's, you know, got that wrap around effect, you know, 'cause, climate change is here. It is not enough, and we do have to address it and by caring for Country and looking after Country, that's how we can" (Grantee)

Promotion of PoP Grant funding (Sub questions 3.7 4.7, 5.4)

Several grantees who successfully completed their projects made it clear that they would not reapply for PoP grants and would exercise caution in recommending this grant program to other organisations. They expressed significant reservations about recommending it to First Nations organisations, citing the administratively burdensome process for a relatively small amount of funding.

Their hesitation to recommend the program stemmed from concerns that the PoP grant process is not suitable for smaller organisations. They worried that the costs of applying for and implementing projects would require organisations to have the financial and physical capacity to support these projects.

But the costs associated with insurance alone for a First Nations community to be considered cultural fire practitioners is cost prohibitive, meaning that we're not able to sustain that type of operation because the economies of scale aren't there. For example, we've got 1 to 2 current trust grants that involve cultural burning, but because they're in urbanized areas as the CEO, I'm reluctant to approve the works plan for that to occur. (Grantee)

There is a huge risk to smaller organisations that they could over promise on their projects to deliver. Grant applicants should also be aware of the consequences of not have strong internal infrastructure to support the project, as the funding will not cover administrative costs.

"We will be very reluctant to put ourselves through the arduous project planning and reporting templates and processes again. We only survived this as our manager has strong corporate project management and excel spreadsheet skills, otherwise it is way beyond our capacity, and way too complex given the relatively small grant amounts."
(Grantee)

The most suggested way of promoting PoP was for the Trust to go out in community and speak with people face-to-face. This would need to be a regular series of events and ensure all regional communities across the New South Wales state are addressed.

There needs to be recognition of how First Nations organisations and communities will engage with Government bodies. It is recommended that a First Nations person/s would lead this engagement and have the agency of the Trust with the appropriate resources and authority.

If they sent it out to First Nations organisations using social media [that would be much better] (Grantee)

Recommendations

33. The Trust should empower the First Nations staff to lead the Grant Program and be provided with agency and resources to implement changes.
34. The Trust maintain a calendar of community events to attend with the aim of promoting the PoP Grant program.
35. The Trust is to broaden the scope of communication and incorporate other critical environmental issues, such as Climate Change. Providing communities with additional knowledge and funding opportunities to enhance the quality of life in the areas they inhabit.
36. The Trust to place contract requirements on grantees to fully cooperate with Departmental funded evaluations, research of quality improvements.

Conclusion

The Protecting our Places (PoP) grant program has demonstrated positive outcomes, although several recommendations can further enhance its impact.

Aligning the grant total with comparable programs of \$120,000 would provide more substantial support to Grantees. There is potential to introduce incentives for successful project completion, in addition to the base grant this would motivate Grantees and recognise their achievements.

The application process was described as a clear barrier to organisations applying. Streamlining the application process through a tiered system and a screening process would reduce administrative requirements for applicants, making the program more accessible for new applicants.

There is an opportunity to encourage staged projects, without enforcing Grantees to undertake two applications. We recommend that one application should be sufficient for two funding rounds, if the first stage of the project is completed and has a successful acquittal.

Allocating an annual budget for site visits to Grantees is essential. These visits provide firsthand insights into community needs and allow the Trust to understand how the PoP grant can be effectively utilised. During these visits, exploring the local context and engaging with community members can inform future program decisions.

Prioritising face-to-face engagement with Grantees and the communities they serve is crucial. Building strong relationships during these interactions can yield valuable promotional assets, including photos, testimonials, and case studies. By involving Grantees directly, the Trust can create a portfolio that showcases the program's success and community benefits.

Collaboration with other NSW Government departments in regional areas is recommended. Introducing the PoP program to these departments can expand its reach and foster cross-sector partnerships. Leveraging existing networks and resources can enhance program visibility and effectiveness.

Utilising social media and participating in community events specifically targeting First Nations people is recommended. Allocating resources for these activities can amplify program awareness and encourage community participation. Additionally, regular Grantee meetings should be leveraged to identify the need for variations in the early stages of project implementation.

In summary, by implementing these recommendations, the PoP grant program can continue to empower First Nation organisations, strengthen community ties, and achieve meaningful environmental outcomes.

Appendix A - Recommendations

1. The Trust allocates resources to promote the grants to First Nations people. This could be through social media, a variety of new communications channels or community events that specifically attract First Nations people.
2. The Trust implements a continuous improvement process for grantees to follow. This could include facilitating a Community of Practice or Community Forums.
3. The Trust implements regular online meetings with Grantees to manage the progress of activities, potentially at six-month intervals
4. The Trust provides more authentic cultural resources by increasing the number of First Nations staff employed and they are supported to have more on-the-ground engagement.
5. The Trust should utilise the TRC's technical knowledge for the benefit of all grantees. There is potential to share the knowledge through a Community of Practice.
6. Provide the TRC with additional time to review applications. The amount of time should be worked out in collaboration between the Trust and the TRC.
7. The Trust should provide applicants with culturally competent communication regarding their application not being approved. Ensure there is acknowledgment and respect in the messaging.
8. NSW Government to consider the scale of their approach to addressing climate change through these grants and alter the grant offering accordingly.
9. The Trust to provide Grantees with clear guidelines and sets expectations prior to the Capacity Building workshops.
10. The Trust should continue to offer capacity-building workshops to Grantees, specifically targeting new staff who require upskilling. Additionally, the Trust should broadly communicate any additional training opportunities to all Grantees.
11. The Trust to evaluate the benefit of repeat attendance of administration partners who provide secretariat services and who have already completed the training.
12. Increase the grant total to \$120,000 to be comparable to many other First Nation environmental grant programs.
13. Implement a tiered system includes reducing the administration requirements for lower value grants making it a more viable opportunity for new applicants.
14. If projects are to be staged over multiple funding rounds, this requires a streamlined application process that is concise, efficient and succinct.
15. The Trust should utilise regular meetings to identify the need for project variations earlier in the timeline.

16. The Trust invests in face-to-face engagement with Grantees and the communities they work in. This relationship building can assist in building a portfolio of promotional tools such as photos, testimonials or case studies.
17. The Trust allocates an annual budget to conduct two site visits per annum to Grantees.
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22. The Trust is to review their mailing list and update to reflect new organisations, grantees and applicants. This should be reviewed biannually.
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24. The Trust to ensure that the pre-screening process is flexible, culturally safe and conducted by First Nations staff.
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26. Modify the application process to allow applicants to append their current policies and systems in place.
27. The Trust should provide visuals (online or recorded video) to assist with the application process, clearly explaining the eligibility and the process.
28. The Trust to introduce an online reporting system that is a more succinct process in lieu of excel spreadsheet.
29. The Trust to utilise the regular meetings to ensure new staff are informed of the reporting practice and expectation.
30. Reduce the reporting criteria and simplify grants on the lower scale (\$80 000).
31. The Trust is to be flexible with its report submissions, for example include videos, photographs and site visits and visual aids.
32. The Trust to provide acknowledgement and feedback on receipt of the report.
33. The Trust should empower the First Nations staff to lead the Grant Program and be provided with agency and resources to implement changes.

34. The Trust maintain a calendar of community events to attend with the aim of promoting the PoP Grant program.
35. The Trust is to broaden the scope of communication and incorporate other critical environmental issues, such as Climate Change. Providing communities with additional knowledge and funding opportunities to enhance the quality of life in the areas they inhabit.
36. The Trust to place contract requirements on grantees to fully cooperate with Departmental funded evaluations, research of quality improvements.

Appendix B - Key Evaluation Questions

Domains

1. Appropriateness

How appropriately positioned and resourced is the Program?

Sub Questions

- 1.1. How well does the program align with the DPC Grants Administration Guide (Program Guideline only), [NSW Premier's priorities](#) and DPE priorities and policies.
- 1.2. How well do the program objectives and assessment criteria align with the Trust Strategic Plan and relevant Trust Act objects?
- 1.3. To what extent does the program address an identified need and meet market demand?
- 1.4. How appropriate are the Trust's systems, resource materials and procedures in facilitating best practice customer service?
- 1.5. How appropriate is the internal program resourcing in facilitating effective customer service for the program??
- 1.6. How appropriate are the guidance and resources provided to the Technical Review Committee to assist them to perform their duties?

2. Effectiveness

How effective is the program delivery and design?

- 2.1. To what extent is the program improving the quality of ecosystems and environmental assets?
- 2.2. To what extent is the program facilitating the development of environmental expertise and stronger partnerships between individuals, community groups, governments and industry?
- 2.3. To what extent is the program logic clear and well-evidenced (e.g., linkages between assumptions/actions/outcomes) to address any identified shortcomings?
- 2.4. What are the success factors and barriers to achieving program objectives?
- 2.5. Did the grant help to leverage other funding?
- 2.6. What unintended outcomes (positive and negative) were produced and have any unexpected benefits been generated by the selected projects (e.g. cultural, economic, and social)?
- 2.7. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program design?
- 2.8. Is the application assessment process sufficiently robust and transparent to result in the selection of projects that align with the objectives of the program?
- 2.9. To what extent do the capacity-building workshops achieve their intended outcomes and build the capacity of target organisations and individuals

3. Efficiency

- 3.1. Is the amount of funding available appropriate for the environmental need, level of demand and capacity of recipients (per project and whole of program)?

How efficiently is the program being delivered?

- 3.2. What proportion of grant funding is used for the administration of projects?
- 3.3. How well do Trust Administration resources and support systems support grantees and stakeholders to efficiently deliver projects?
- 3.4. How does the program's cost-effectiveness (including administrative costs) compare with similar programs nationally and internationally?
- 3.5. To what extent would the program benefit by offering alternative funding models for grantees, e.g., providing two funding streams similar to the Trust's Restoration and Rehabilitation program or others? Are there other grant funding programs targeting Aboriginal people that the Trust could learn from and what could the Trust potentially consider?
- 3.6. Are there more Culturally appropriate methods than those currently used by Trust staff, to improve the way we follow up with grantees to obtain regular updates on project progress?
- 3.7. How can the Trust advertise to and engage with the target market more effectively through communication channels preferred by the Aboriginal community and what types of options or methods could be applied to achieve this?

4. Equity

How equitable is the program?

- 4.1. To what extent is the program addressing a range of priority environmental issues across NSW? (e.g., riparian, aquatic, coastal, arid zone)
- 4.2. To what extent does the program design facilitate equitable access to applicants across NSW (e.g., eligibility requirements, eligible activities, program promotion, etc.)?
- 4.3. Do barriers exist in attracting a broader range of applicants to the program?
- 4.4. Is the application process accessible, appropriate and well-supported by Trust staff?
- 4.5. Is the program implemented in a culturally safe and appropriate way? What areas require improvement and how could this be achieved?
- 4.6. How could the program be modified to improve alignment with Aboriginal culture, values, and practices throughout the program cycle i.e. application stage, training, reporting and grant administration by the Trust?
- 4.7. How do barriers (refer to Effectiveness KEQ) impact the accessibility of the target audience e.g., geographic location, remoteness, literacy, etc., to the program? What options could be considered as alternatives to the current methods employed to engage applicants (when preparing applications) and grantees (during project implementation) that cater to different learning styles e.g. applying for grants, reporting etc.?

5. Legacy

How enduring are the program outcomes?

- 5.1. To what extent did projects deliver sustainable and or culturally aligned outcomes beyond the project lifetime?
- 5.2. To what extent did grantees continue to utilise resources developed during the project?
- 5.3. To what extent are future considerations (e.g., climate change scenarios, Culture) being appropriately factored into program design by the Trust and project design by grantees?
- 5.4. To what extent were project activities implemented by grantees through the program shared with other Aboriginal communities as examples and used to inspire them to apply for POP funding for their Country? What methods and delivery channels could be suggested to improve this?

Appendix C - Summary of First Nations Environmental Grants

Table 5 - Desktop review of environmental grants

Location	Organisation /Funding Body	Grant or Program Name	Inactive / non active	Funding Available	Identified for First Nations	Website	Information
National	Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC)	Our Country our Future	Active Flexible, apply at any time	Open ended amounts available on request	Specific to First Nations people	https://www.ilsc.gov.au/partner-with-us/our-country-our-future/	ILSC provides various funding opportunities and support for projects related to land acquisition, land management, and economic development for First Nations and Torres Strait Islander communities. Focus Areas • Conservation and Healthy Country • Urban Investment • Niche Indigenous Products • Tourism • Agribusiness
National	Depart of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication	Stronger Communities	Active	\$5,000 to \$20,000	Non Specific	Stronger Communities Guidelines	While not exclusively focused on Indigenous communities, the SCP provides funding for projects that improve the life of communities, and many First Nations and Torres Strait Islander organizations may apply for these grants.

	and the Arts						National Distribution to 151 Electorates throughout Australia. Applications go to the MP to submit to the department for assessment.
National	NIAA	Capacity Building for Native Title Corporations	National	\$50,000-\$750,000	Specific to First Nations people - Native title bodies	https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/grants-and-funding/capacity-building-native-title-corporations	This funding can be used for: - Increasing the capacity of PBCs to take advantage of economic opportunities, including regionalisation by bringing PBCs together on a regional basis to increase local and regional capacity, enable targeted organisational support; - Building long-term organisational capacity within PBCs through training and obtaining professional expertise (for example, business or agribusiness consultancies, accountancy, or legal services); and - Supporting effective native title agreement-making, and - Helping PBCs amend their rulebooks to ensure they align with changes to native title laws (\$7.1 million over three years from 2021 22 to 2023-24).
National	Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR)	Offers People Grants, Place Grants and Disaster Grants	Active	Various Most up to \$10 000	Non-Specific	Place Grants FRRR	FRRR offers various grant programs that support projects aimed at improving the social, economic, and cultural well-being of Indigenous communities in rural and regional Australia. FRRR provides funding and capacity building support at the hyper-local level. <u>We have reach, relationships, networks, and know-how</u> to align funding, big and small, to community-led solutions that build resilience and long-term viability and vitality of smaller remote, rural, and regional communities across Australia.
National	The Ian Potter Foundation	Environment	Active	\$100,000	Non-specific	Environment The Ian Potter Foundation	The Environment program supports ambitious and transformative environmental initiatives, including: Strengthening the environment sector

						Applied environmental science research On ground conservation of natural resources and preservation of threatened biodiversity and ecosystems. The Foundation is interested in applications that are strategically important, nationally significant, and collaborative. This funding area considers large grants (\$100,000+ and multi-year) within and across multiple environmental areas including land, freshwater, marine, and coastal. We welcome applications from environmental not-for-profits, universities, and other research institutions. We prioritise projects that employ several of the following approaches:
National	DCCEEW	First Nation Heritage Grants	Active	\$25 000 to \$250 000	Non-Specific	https://www.dcceew.gov.au/parks-heritage/heritage/grants-and-funding/aust-ralian-heritage-grants The First Nations Heritage Grants program will help identify and protect First Nations heritage in existing World and National Heritage-listed places. The program will provide \$5.5 million over the next 3 years, with a call for applications each year. Existing World and National Heritage-listed places that have been recognised for their natural, Indigenous, or historic heritage values are eligible to apply. The program aims to: • Support the addition of Indigenous values to existing World Heritage and National Heritage listed properties. • Better protect First Nations heritage and improve engagement with First Nations Peoples to support their heritage.
Queensland	Queensland Government	Looking after Country	Active	\$75,000	Specific to First Nations people	https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/ The Looking after Country Grant Program provides funding of up to \$75,000 to First Nations communities to conserve and manage environmental and cultural

		Grant Program				plants-animals/conservation/community/land-sea-rangers/grants-program> List of recipients and past projects	heritage on Country. The program aims to build community capacity to deliver these projects, and to develop strong partnerships in caring for Country. Project activities funded through the program include (but are not limited to): • cultural site management • protected species monitoring and conservation • revegetation and habitat restoration • fire management • erosion control • inter-generational knowledge exchange on Country • the development and implementation of Country management plans.
Western Australia	Western Australia Government	2022-2023 First Nations Heritage Grants	Western Australia	\$40 000	Non-Specific	https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/2022-2023-aboriginal-heritage-grants-0#who-can-apply	Grant applications will only be accepted for projects associated with heritage places that are Registered Sites on the Register of Places and Objects (the Register) at the time of applying. You can check which places are on the Register using the First Nations Heritage Inquiry System. Eligibility requirements and ineligible activities are outlined in the Guidelines for Applicants. Grants of up to \$40 000 for First Nations heritage projects.
Northern Territory	Northern Territory Government	First Nations Rangers grant	Active	Single year project up to \$200K, two-year project up to \$300K.	Specific to First Nations people	First Nations Ranger Grants Program Department of Environment, Parks, and	The Northern Territory Government's First Nations Ranger Grants program provides support to First Nations ranger groups to manage their land and sea Country. Project and activity based work. May include cultural and social outcomes, in addition to environmental outcomes.

						<u>Water Security</u>	One or two year projects – must be fully expended by June 2025. Single year project up to \$200K, two year project up to \$300K. A separate application must be submitted for each project for which funding is sought.
Norther Territory	Northern Territory Government	Heritage Grants Program	Northern Territory	\$20,000	Non- Specific	<u>Heritage Grants Program NT.GOV.AU</u>	You can apply for up to \$20,000 to protect and manage a heritage place or object through the Northern Territory (NT) Heritage Grants Program. Priority is given to places and objects on the NT Heritage Register and First Nations archaeological places. Grants may also be considered for other places and objects of historical importance.
Tasmania	Tasmanian Government	Landcare Action Grants Program	No Active funding round advertised	2023 budget still being finalized.	Non-Specific	<u>Natural Resource Management Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (nre.tas.gov.au)</u>	The Tasmanian Government has allocated \$900,000 over four years in the 2021-22 State Budget to continue the Landcare Action Grants Program, which builds on \$1.8m in funding provided in previous years. The program provides State-funded grant opportunities to co-invest with farmers, Landcare, and other community organisations on practical on-ground works for sustainable agriculture and Rivercare type activities. The scope of the program has now been expanded to include carbon farming initiatives, with the potential to link these activities with the Government's Carbon Farming Advice Rebate.
South Australia	South Australia	Native Vegetation Incentives Program	No Active funding rounds advertised		Non - Specific	<u>Department for Environment and Water - Native Vegetation Incentives...</u>	Significant Environmental Benefit (SEB) Grants fund the on-ground restoration of native vegetation in South Australia. Money is paid into the Native Vegetation Fund by people who have cleared native vegetation and need to provide an SEB. To offset the clearance, NVC use this money to

						<u>List of SEB Grants_Oct 2022</u>	restore and protect native vegetation through SEB grants. Since its introduction in 2009, the Native Vegetation Council has supported 74 critical projects across the eight Landscape regions through Significant Environmental Benefit Grants. Over \$16.9 million has been committed to conservation enhancement and landscape management works in an effort to improve biodiversity.
South Australia	South Australia Government	New Heritage Conservation Grants Program	South Australia	\$20,000	Non Specific	<u>Department for Environment and Water - Heritage Grants</u>	New Heritage Conservation Grants Program Grants from Round 1 of the new program have been awarded to 18 projects, which will receive funding in 2023-24: The minimum grant for any project is \$1,000. There are three categories of funding. Simple- up to \$5,000 (GST exclusive) – Projects may include - Documentation, e.g. Architect fees, conservation management plans, dilapidation reports, development application drawings/schedules. Simple projects with only one component, e.g. Salt damp treatment or re-roofing. Complex – up to \$10,000 (GST exclusive) – THIS IS THE MAXIMUM AVAILABLE TO RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES. Major– up to \$20,000 (GST exclusive) - ONLY AVAILABLE FOR NON-RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES. Projects for non-residential properties with multiple components addressing at least two of the Assessment Criteria, e.g. (1) Places at risk; (2) Adaptive re-use.

